Transnational Municipal Networks in Climate Politics:
From Global Governance to Global Politics
Introduction

Globalization involves a range of causes and consequences, processes and actors, spaces and places. Among actors are municipalities, and among places are cities, loci of centripetal and centrifugal forces. The centripetal aspect—the ways in which forces from outside the city come to bear upon the city—is an oft-studied phenomenon. The centrifugal aspect—the ways in which cities generate forces that bear upon the extra-urban world—is somewhat less carefully studied. While a vast literature is focused on the question, “What is globalization doing to cities?”, the flipside of that question—“What are cities doing to globalization?” or “What are cities globalizing?”—is slightly less often engaged.

This paper engages with such matters by exploring the place of cities in global environmental politics and, more specifically, the collective response of some cities to climate change. In the article, I address the following questions: How might municipal efforts toward a climate-stable future be significant to the larger issue of ecological justice in global environmental politics? Might cities be able to redefine the rules of the game and take a stand on ‘inefficient’ norms? Might cities, as Roger Keil asks, find “a strategy to solve ecological problems [that] leads potentially to a democratization of society, economy, and the state” (1995)? Might creative municipal redeployment of “the physics of globalization” (Appadurai 2002) potentiate a subversive redeployment of the politics of globalization? Examining the role of transnational municipal networks in global climate stabilization strategies, this paper serves as a wedge with which to approach the larger questions of the presence and influence of cities in the world.
I first briefly account for the relationship between cities and the world in an age of globalization. Following a characterization of technical leadership as a legitimizing force of and in global environmental governance and norm entrepreneurship as a potential source of contestation and subversion in global environmental politics, I examine the urban contribution to climate change and local measures to promote a climate-stable future, addressing the question of what cities are globalizing—both in terms of pollution, environmental degradation, and risk, and in terms of politics. I explore the possibility that emerging horizontal and vertical relationships, intermunicipal relationships and relationships between cities or networks of cities and other scales of governance, potentiate roles for cities in both climate governance and global environmental politics.

**Cities and the World in an Age of Globalization**

Urban studies have historically examined the causes and consequences of the urban condition as well as the origins and implications of urban issues. For these reasons, they have long been regarded as reflecting relatively provincial concerns and for some time fell out of vogue in political studies, especially with the intensification of globalization and the increasing importance of transnational non-state and non-governmental organizations. If these forces and organizations were claimed by some to eclipse the nation-state, how much more so could they be regarded as eclipsing the city?

To an extent, extra-governmental forces can rightly be regarded as having diluted municipal capacity for local governance, just as they have diluted federal capacity for national governance. Both the city and the nation-state contend with what Arjun Appadurai describes as “a crisis of redundancy” (2002). Municipal, like national, governance capacities and commitments are duplicated, more or less, by private and civil
society sectors at various scales. This may seem the occasion for a departure from urban politics among those for whom the object of inquiry is primarily, if not only, individuals—individual people, agencies, organizations, or departments—in the city. But for those concerned with the city, itself, as a primary object of inquiry, with the presence and influence of the city in the world, such changes have marked a new potential—indeed, a new imperative—for inquiry into what Julie-Anne Boudreau has called “the centrality of urban politics in a global era” (2007). Globalization is characterized, as Saskia Sassen notes, by “the emergence of conditions that weaken the exclusive authority of national states and thereby facilitate the ascendance of sub- and transnational spaces and actors in politico-civic processes once confined to the national level” (2004). Such sub- and transnational spaces and actors include urban areas and municipalities. Boudreau argues that four forces have “urbanized” the global political process: 1) decentralization and increased intergovernmental relations; 2) conventionally municipal policy interests moving to the national and global scales and conventionally national and global policy interests moving to the local scale; 3) the re-scaling of civil society activities; and 4) the continued territorialization of the policy-making process (2007). This dissolution, or, in some cases, negation, of scalar boundaries occasions urbanists’ re-engagement with the global, as well as internationalists’ re-engagement with the local.

Urbanization has also been among the chief drivers of this recent interest in urban influence. Migration to the city has ensured strong population growth in urban areas despite the typically inverse relationship between urbanization and birth rates (McNeill 2007). And those areas of the world with the greatest urban populations are also experiencing the most significant total population growth. The world’s urban population
reached 3.2 billion in 2005, representing 50% of the global population for the first time in history. This is projected to increase to almost 5 billion by 2030, and demographers anticipate that cities of the global south will absorb the net global population growth of the next 23 years. While urban population and projected population growth alone would merit increased attention to cities, there are other reasons for this interest.

Accompanying and facilitating this growth in urban population has been a revolution in communication and transportation technology. In Thomas Friedman’s flat world (2006), urban populations connect with each other through the communication and transportation opportunities that have been the focus of much globalization literature. These same technologies and other phenomena of globalization also permit cities a kind of perverse “connection” to the natural world, betraying the enlightenment promise to liberate “society” from the constraints of “nature,” human and otherwise. Advances in transportation technology and in technologies associated with natural resource extraction lead to farther ranging supply chains for urban metabolism and to increased consumption by urban populations. As Timothy Luke writes, “Today’s ‘global cities,’ then, are entirely new built environments tied to several complex layers of technological systems whose logistical grids are knit into other networks for the production, consumption, circulation, and accumulation of commodities…. As a planetary system of material production and consumption, these built environments constitute much of the world-wide webs of logistical flows which swamp over the conventional boundaries between the human and the natural with a new biopolitics of urbanism” (2003). And this is reflected in increasing (and increasingly) urban ecological footprints. The expansion of footprint, it seems, has outpaced population growth despite the potential in some sectors for
sustainable development associated with increasing densities of urban settlement. In an expression of mutual influence, the generative capacities of cities extend to global environmental degradation while the global environment constrains urban possibilities.

Recognizing their contribution to environmental problems and their vulnerability to environmental risk, many municipalities have become more involved in solutions to environmental crises, joining the ranks of other, and more often studied, non-state actors involved in governing the global environment. Cities have exploited their flexibility to implement innovative policy mechanisms to govern biodiversity, waste, and energy (Portney 2003).

But, as with contributions to environmental degradation, contributions to environmental politics do not necessarily end at municipal boundaries. Many cities aspire to a critical role in solving global environmental problems. Drawing upon the same revolutionary technologies of communication and transportation, cities have established a global network of urban nodes—a horizontal network of place-based actors—through cooperative intermunicipal efforts such as the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) and the International Solar Cities Initiative (ISCI). Some of these campaigns have worked to achieve more sustainable policies at the national and international levels, establishing significant vertical relationships with individual and collective agents of formal and informal governance at other scales, as well. These horizontal and vertical networks may permit cities a significant role in the diffusion of both techniques and norms, important functions of governance and politics.

**Technical Leadership and Norm Entrepreneurship in Global Environmental Politics**
Summarizing Andre Drainville, Sassen writes that “‘global governance’ is found in localizations of neoliberalism… [and is] the political handmaiden of global corporate neoliberalism” (2004). If one accepts Lorraine Elliott’s definition of global environmental governance as “a political practice which simultaneously reflects, constitutes, and masks global relations of power and powerlessness,” we may understand global environmental governance as one part of global environmental politics, one participating in (to borrow from Chantal Mouffe (1999)) the deployment of practices, discourses, and institutions that establish certain order and organize human and environmental coexistence to “legitimise a neoliberal ecopolitics” in the face of antagonism (2002). On the other hand, a subversive politics might be one in which neoliberal eco-politics are contested. The differences between a legitimizing or an obscurantist politics and a potentially (though not necessarily) subversive politics can be cast as the difference between technical prepossession and normative preoccupation.\textsuperscript{vi}

Technical capacities are essential to the governance of the global environment. Leadership in the development of skills may involve pioneering problem-solving activities in which actors are among the first to engage a particular environmental challenge or to engage it with unique methods. This technical leadership may involve formal feasibility studies and demonstration projects, but may be less intentional. Intermunicipal/horizontal and interscale/vertical diffusion of skills is possible within or without the context of intentionality.

Technical prepossession either masks or legitimizes current ecologically mediated social relations. As Drainville suggests, “Global governance is also a radical political programme intent on putting in place the social and political infrastructure of a
sustainable global order free of irritants and resistance. It is, to borrow from LeCorbusier, a ‘revolution by solutions’ (2004). To say that the subversive potential of “best practices” is minimal is an understatement when, in fact, the varied deployments of best practices may represent actually-existing eco-modernization.

While technical leadership is undoubtedly important to the management of both ecological conditions and social relations, but dubiously politically subversive, normative leadership has greater potential for contestation and subversion. The emergence, acceptance, and internalization of norms—the norm life cycle—have become a focus of research in world politics (Klotz 1995, Finnemore, Sikkink 1998). Norms are “established practices, codes of conduct, and standards of acceptable behavior” that reflect “oughtness and shared moral assessment,” or “shared ideas, expectations, and beliefs about appropriate behavior” (Finnemore, Sikkink 1998, Ingebritsen 2002). While norms do not strictly determine behavior, they do constrain behavior, setting parameters of acceptability. Though norms are broad and intersubjectively determined, actors interpret and operationalize norms in specific and subjective manners (Finnemore, Sikkink 1998, Hoffmann 2007). In so doing, and by virtue of variety in interpretation and operationalization, actors participate in norm contestation and dynamics (Hoffmann 2007). While the subversive potential of technical leadership is minimal, the subversive potential of norm entrepreneurship, on the other hand, is substantial. The deployment of new norms in the global governance landscape has the potential to deligitimize neo-liberal eco-politics and to advance a progressive environmental agenda.

Agents of norm emergence are considered norm entrepreneurs, the objective of which, per Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, is to “persuade a critical mass of
states (norm leaders) to embrace new norms by calling attention to or creating issues” (1998). Norm entrepreneurs construct and mobilize support for “particular standards of appropriateness” and convince states, potential norm leaders, to adopt these standards (Finnemore, Sikkink 1998). Importantly, as Matthew Hoffmann writes, “entrepreneurship can be explicit or implicit (i.e., taking actions can be entrepreneurial even if they are not explicitly designed to persuade anyone)” (2007). Significantly, norm entrepreneurship is not qualified by *post hoc* acceptance and internalization by other actors.

Citing Finnemore and Sikkink, Hoffmann notes that entrepreneurs may be “actors within the normative community… or actors outside the normative community” (2007). Norm entrepreneurs, therefore, may be state or non-state actors. They may also be supra-state collectives. Christine Ingebritsen suggests Scandinavia as an example of the latter (2002, see also 2006); a few states with relatively little conventional power and changing strategic importance led the way in developing new norms regarding conflict prevention and mediation as well as foreign aid, introducing the principle of ideologically, rather than strategically, motivated aid (2002, 2006).

The norm life cycle is of special interest in global environmental politics, in which competing norms—even first principles—define the landscape of major controversies. As with conflict and foreign aid, Scandinavia has significantly influenced the emergence and adoption of norms in global environmental politics, advancing the norm of sustainable development (Ingebritsen 2002, 2006). Significantly, Ingebritsen attributes much of Scandinavia’s success in this regard to efforts at the local level, as municipalities have adopted policies aimed at the conservation of biological diversity and
the promotion of a broader environmental agenda as well as the reduction of energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions for the purposes of climate stabilization (2002, see also Forsberg 1997). Ingebritsen argues, in this instance, that municipal policy can serve not only as a technical prototype, but also as a normative prototype.

Climate change, specifically, has been among the loci of inquiry into the emergence, acceptance, and internalization of norms in environmental politics (Andresen, Agrawala 2002, Hoffmann 2005, Hoffmann 2007, Traxler 2002). Among climate politics-oriented non-state norm entrepreneurs is the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS), a network representing the interests of more than 43 states and observers, many of which share basic climate-related vulnerabilities, even if not significant responsibilities. This shared interest has driven members of the organization to emphasize both horizontal and vertical relationships, and to advance “flexible alternatives” to mainstream policy mechanisms and “cooperative approaches” to their implementation (Ashe, Van Lierop & Cherian 1999, Heileman 1993, Larson 2003), participating in the climate governance norm life cycle in ways that can now be observed among other non-state actors, including cities. Though potential for norm entrepreneurship is enhanced by the statal capacities, spatial jurisdictions, and issue-based jurisdictions of actors, it is not dependent upon these.

While technical leadership may occasion only participation that masks or legitimizes the neoliberal ecopolitics of climate change, norm entrepreneurship may occasion the articulation—diffusion, adoption, interpretation, and operationalization—of new and subversive rules of the climate game. But how might cities participate in either?

**Cities, Climate, and Global Environmental Politics**
Although anthropogenic climate change may have been a reality in pre-industrial times due to deforestation (Williams 2003), the scope, scale, and speed of its current manifestation is generally considered a problem of an industrialized, globalized, and urbanized world. Only modern societies could produce such a phenomenon, and cities are a chief feature of the modern landscape. However, engagement in international negotiations for the abatement of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions has been fairly limited to nation-states. At the same time, most consider the likely solutions to climate change to require global—in the universal sense of the word—cooperation, rather than unilateralism. While the multilateralism of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol is essential to robust collective action, non-state actors—whether coalitions of states, sub-national governments, or non-governmental organizations—have contributed and will continue to contribute solutions to climate change. Among these non-state actors are cities, whose 3.2 billion people exceed the population of the European Union by 2.8 billion, the population of Scandinavia by more than 3.1 billion, and the population of AOSIS by 2.9 billion, and whose greenhouse gas emissions exponentially exceed those of non-governmental advocacy groups. This is not to suggest that municipalities should be regarded as on equal footing with nation-states, or that globalization—James Rosenau’s “fragmegration” of formal and informal governance (1997)—has somehow made truly inter-national cooperation obsolete or unnecessary, but, rather, to suggest only that municipalities may be significant non-state actors in global environmental politics, just as they are in other areas of governance, such as global financial affairs (Sassen 1994, Taylor 2001, Taylor 2004).
The literature on cities and climate change is fragmented and, for the most part, narrowly focused on the local aspects—whether technical or political—of municipal climate change policy (Byrne et al. 2004, Byrne et al. 2005, Byrne et al. 2006, Kousky, Schneider 2003, Slocum 2004). Literature transcending ‘domestic’ aspects of municipal climate change policy is generally limited to an examination of inter-municipal relationships, the effects of these relationships upon municipal politics and policy-making (Byrne et al. 2007, Lindseth 2004, Rickerson, Hughes Under Review), and the effects of national and global climate policy upon municipal policy (Bulkeley, Kern 2006, Hjerpe, Linner 2007). A somewhat smaller, but important, portion of the literature examines the role of cities or these networks in global environmental politics (Betsill, Bulkeley 2004, Betsill, Bulkeley 2006, Bulkeley, Betsill 2003).

Like members of AOSIS, cities share common interests due to increased vulnerability to climate change, among other environmental hazards (Pelling 2003). Significantly, however, cities also share common interests due to common responsibility. Vulnerability and responsibility, coupled with an increasing urban population, make cities especially important potential leaders in multi-centric and multi-level global climate governance (Betsill, Bulkeley 2006). Like other governmental, but non-state actors, cities have jurisdiction, govern with a flexibility not enjoyed by nation-states, and typically do not face conflicts with strategic interests. Unlike non-governmental actors, cities have large populations and much more direct influence on emissions. And, as with many non-governmental organizations, cities participate in transnational advocacy organizations, establishing, in much the same way as has AOSIS, horizontal and vertical relationships to multiply their effects. Such potential for influence implies that, while
cities globalize environmental ills, they may also globalize techniques and norms for their mitigation.

In the first place, cities are globalizing resource depletion, pollution, and risk. In many ways, cities live in parasitic relationship with their hinterlands, extracting resources. This has been a recognized feature of urban settlement for centuries and is well-chronicled (see, for example, Mumford 1961). Ancient cities received tribute from settlements in the hinterland. A contemporary measurement of such relationships is the ecological footprint (Wackernagel, Rees 1996). Such indices recognize that the hinterland is now global, with global urban consumption driving global hinterland resource extraction to unsustainable paces.\textsuperscript{xvi} Cities of the global north have an average footprint of almost four times an equitable level. While footprint and other such measures emphasize the spatial dimension of the relationship between urban human settlement and global resource extraction, in an era of sustainable development (or, as some have suggested since 2002’s World Summit on Sustainable Development, an era after sustainable development), some have explored the temporal dimensions of the urban relationship with the hinterlands. Cities consuming resources at unsustainable rates essentially foreclose on future options.\textsuperscript{xvii}

Thus, cities are globalizing resource depletion, rather than simply resource extraction; and energy resources are among the most important that cities are depleting. Urban metabolism requires significant amounts of energy delivered in the form of electricity—produced by the combustion of fossil fuels, through nuclear technology, or by alternative or renewable sources—heat, and fuel for transportation. The consumption of these particular resources highlights a second thing\textsuperscript{xviii} that cities are globalizing:
pollution. Global urban pollution is certainly not limited to the results of energy consumption; for example, cities are globalizing trash, which now famously includes tremendous amounts of e-waste (Pellow 2007, Pellow 2006). But in the consumption of energy and in the pollution that accompanies it, cities are globalizing both ecological decline and risk. As Luke writes, “‘global cities’ leave very destructive environmental footprints as their inhabitants reach out into markets around the world for material inputs to survive, but the transactions of this new political ecology also are the root causes of global ecological decline” (2003).

Especially with the prospective hazards and consequences of anthropogenic climate change, the immediate causes of which—greenhouse gas emissions and land use change—are attributable to a great extent to urban consumption, cities globalize risk. Cities account for roughly 80% of global greenhouse gas emissions and urban demands for other raw materials have significant impacts upon land use both in peri-urban areas and in the global hinterland. This globalization of risk most clearly highlights the extra-urban “spatial fix” associated with urban development. Considering the depletion of resources, it might be argued that cities are not externalizing ills, but are simply trading for raw materials to which they do not have local access. In the case of pollution and risk, however, cities are certainly exercising forms of spatial and temporal externalization.

In many cases, such as the export of e-waste or nuclear waste, the externalization of direct risk is almost total. Capacities for this externalization differ substantially across “transnational urbanism;” as Luke writes, “Many mechanisms in the world’s political economy permit Dallas more than Delhi to dump more toxic wastes outside...
specific locales, boost their concentrations beyond permissible thresholds, raise
exposures so intensively as to threaten health, and disperse effects indiscriminately across
space and time” (2003). In the case of anthropogenic climate change, however, cities are
globalizing a risk that will come home to roost. For a number of reasons, urban
populations are particularly vulnerable to many of the projected ill effects of climate
change. Cities are, in effect, fouling their own nests, though this admission should not
obscure the inequities still present in the great discrepancies between responsibility and
vulnerability.

Recognizing both unusual vulnerability and significant responsibility, many cities
have undertaken climate change mitigation strategies. Some are engaged in GHG
emissions abatement measures, others in measures for GHG sequestration and climate
change adaptation—some of them related to land use, land use change, and forestry—and
still others in measures designed to reap the “triple benefits” of emissions abatement,
biodiversity conservation, and community development. While most cities do not have
the most powerful energy policy instruments at their disposal, and while governance of
urban metabolisms is diffused across urban agglomerations according to municipal
boundaries, many have significant control over energy use through direct or indirect
regulation of generation, distribution and consumption. Land use policy, for example, is
the purview of many municipalities. Many cities have the latitude to effect policy
measures for efficiency and conservation in building and transportation. Such a variety
of policy instruments also lends cities the flexibility to highlight co-benefits in ways that
are more difficult at larger scales.
This is not to “black box” the city, making it appear as if unequal development and associated power relations are not internally relevant, or as if co-benefits accrue equitably at the municipal level by virtue of a smaller scale. This scale-romanticism has been refuted by a number of scholars who caution us against the assumption that smaller scale ensures equitable social relations (Imboela 2004, Smith 2001). Indeed, some have undertaken critical studies of the social project sometimes associated with greening the city (Keil, Boudreau 2006, Pellow 2004). And, as Kent Portney notes, “Even those cities that have elected to incorporate equity considerations into their sustainability initiatives have done so in only a superficial way” (2003). Such local promotion of green agendas, including equity-laced climate-stabilization policies, can be regarded, for their focus on co-benefits, among other reasons, as instantiations of actually existing eco-modernization. Some such initiatives may, in fact, represent local responses to the demands of a global service economy, as much as, or more than, they are responses to climate change. For this reason, it seems, technical leadership obscures social relations at the heart of both neo-liberalism and ecological devastation.

Yet the question of political potential of norm entrepreneurship remains an open one. While technically preoccupied municipal initiatives contribute to global environmental governance, normatively preoccupied municipal initiatives may advance a progressive global environmental politics. In either case, municipal capacities are augmented by the formation of inter-municipal networks.

Transcending municipal boundaries, a number of initiatives have emerged to take advantage of urban connectivity, stimulating inter-municipal dialogue and leveraging global influence. These include the United States Conference of Mayors’ (USCOM)
Climate Protection Agreement (CPA), ICLEI’s Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) program, and the International Solar Cities Initiative (ISCI). All of these initiatives, while distinct, share a common focus upon emissions abatement. Though international negotiations since the Eighth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC have turned, in significant measure, toward climate change adaptation, cities have, to a great extent, been able to maintain a focus on the mitigation of climate change impacts through the abatement of greenhouse gas emissions. Many cities that have joined these initiatives have implemented policy mechanisms meant to address GHG emissions through energy policy, both in the utility and transport sectors, and through sequestration efforts. The two most significant transnational projects in this regard are the ICLEI CCP and the ISCI networks.  

Cities for Climate Protection: Globalizing Technical Leadership in Climate Governance

The CCP program is the most studied municipal network dedicated to a climate-stable future. Now in its 15th year, more than 650 municipal governments from over 30 countries participate in the campaign, which is designed around a program of five milestones—emissions inventory and forecasting, emissions reduction targeting, development of a local action plan, implementation of policies and measures, and monitoring and verification of outcomes—to which cities must commit (International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, 2007). With 549 cities in 2001, collective emissions of CCP member municipalities were 8% of the global total (Bulkeley, Betsill 2003). Current member cities account for approximately 15% of global anthropogenic GHG emissions.
Harriet Bulkeley and Michele Betsill’s book-length treatment of cities and climate change presents case studies of six CCP member cities framed by a discussion of local government in climate politics and transnational networks in global environmental governance (2003). The authors find that the programs undertaken by these CCP member municipalities differ greatly in their success and that five key factors (representing both capacity and commitment)—the “presence of committed individuals;” “the availability of funding;” municipal regulatory power in the areas of land use, transportation, and energy; definition of co-benefits and synergies; and political will—determine the impact of the program on cities (Bulkeley, Betsill 2003). In a study of 23 CCP cities, Kousky and Schneider find that, for a number of reasons associated with scale, cities can overcome what for other scales of governance might be significant free-rider obstacles (2003). According to these studies, CCP is effective in inspiring interest in new initiatives, in stimulating continued development of ongoing initiatives, and in motivating cities to consider co-benefits and synergies related to climate policy (Bulkeley, Betsill 2003, Kousky, Schneider 2003). CCP builds local capacity through networking and the diffusion of best practices and by partnering with national governments in project sponsorship.

With such broad participation, CCP members have access to robust horizontal relationships. Vertical relationships are built through partnerships with national governments and through ICLEI CCP’s participation in and statements at the UNFCCC. Kousky and Schneider emphasize the potential of such relationships with reference to municipal leadership in recycling, suggesting that such local initiatives can serve as demonstration projects for regional, national, and international governmental and non-
governmental organizations (Kousky, Schneider 2003). As important as such demonstration projects are—and, as has been suggested, municipalities may be uniquely situated to advance innovative solutions—their horizontal and vertical diffusion represents a technical, rather than normative, leadership. In fact, the CCP and its member cities most often frame the call to action in terms of co-benefits that primarily satisfy the demands of other competing first principles, thus legitimizing neoliberal ecopolitical principles and diluting the capacity for norm contestation.

While the CCP began with the goal of reducing member cities’ emissions by 20%, any requirement of such has been abandoned in favor of locally legitimated targets for the purposes of attracting a broader membership. The CCP regards effectiveness, and possibly legitimacy, as functions of breadth, favoring extensive association rather than intensive commitment.

This is not to suggest that CCP and its member municipalities provide no normative leadership in the international community. While some might suggest that the CCP and its member cities lag behind the international community in their continued focus on mitigation, rather than adaptation, others might consider persistent support for abatement efforts in the face of growing international attention to adaptation to be an exercise in leadership. But this leadership may be considered the operationalization of norms within the context of hegemonic efficiency, rather than the potentially subversive introduction of new norms.

International Solar Cities Initiative: Globalizing Norms in Climate Governance

The past 10 years have seen the development of a number of similarly focused programs to that of the CCP. Other regional and global networks of urban nodes have
formed with the goal of contributing to a climate-stable future. National and regional networks, while important, lack the scalar ambitions of ICLEI’s CCP. The International Solar Cities Initiative, on the other hand, aspires to the kind of global membership enjoyed by ICLEI’s CCP. However, ISCI also aspires to a type of global influence beyond the technical aspects of best practices.

At the first International Solar Cities Congress (ISCC) in Daegu, Korea, in 2004, 19 cities \textsuperscript{xxiii} signed the Daegu Declaration, committing to energy efficiency and to conservation measures leading to decreased GHG emissions. While the Daegu Declaration affirms the “common understanding that each city will set its own target for renewable energy adoption with a specific timetable most appropriate for its geographical, economic, and political circumstances” (International Solar Cities Initiative 2006), the International Solar Cities Vision affirms the goal of a sustainable and equitable per capita emissions target (International Solar Cities Initiative 2005). ISCI aims at the development of a cadre of entrepreneurial, pioneer, or “‘benchmark’ cities, which commit to ambitious emission reduction goals… which meet 2050 IPCC-consistent targets” (International Solar Cities Initiative 2005). In these ways, ISCI champions and operationalizes two norms—intragenerational equity and intergenerational equity—that set the network apart from others and potentiate a political role as norm entrepreneur in global greenhouse gas emissions abatement strategies.

Of course, both intragenerational and intergenerational equity are concerns of the \textit{wider discourse} regarding climate change and its abatement. Equity of either sort, however, is a norm largely absent, in an operational sense, from mechanisms of climate governance. Kyoto’s nod to intragenerational equity through the principle of common
but differentiated responsibility is operationalized through participation, limiting the number of nation-states with targets during the first budget period.\textsuperscript{xxiv} The principle, applied as it is to the question of which parties should have targets, remains, however, disconnected from emissions targets, which, under the Protocol, are more or less arbitrary reductions from national 1990 levels. Most municipal climate policy also reflects little interest in intragenerational equity, seeming rather to have its discursive foundations in self-interested rational choice. Intergenerational equity is expressed by reference to sustainable development, but remains under-articulated in most municipal climate policy and by the networks that multiply their efforts.

However, ISCI’s per capita approach to emissions target-setting for a climate stable future operationalizes these two normative dimensions of ecological justice—intrigenerational and intergenerational equity—in ways uncommon to global climate governance. Targeting a global emissions level that would stabilize atmospheric GHG concentrations at approximately 450 ppm of CO\textsubscript{2}-e, such an approach divides total emissions by world population to determine an appropriate per capita level, which can then be multiplied by the population of any unit (e.g., city) to determine a sustainable and equitable collective target (Byrne et al. 1998).\textsuperscript{xxv} This process uniquely privileges and operationalizes both intergenerational and intragenerational equity in ways perhaps incommensurable with the privileging of efficiency that has so far dominated the discourse of climate governance, subverting and contesting neoliberal ecopolitics in favor of a potentially progressive agenda.

These measures recognize the common resource characteristic of the earth’s atmosphere, oceans, and soils, three primary loci of the carbon cycle responsible for the
storage of greenhouse gases. Even non-binding commitment\textsuperscript{xxvi} to such responses reflects a flexibility not exhibited by the nation-states that negotiated the Kyoto Protocol. While some few participants—usually non-state actors—introduced the possibility of per capita emissions targets, such a radical notion was not seriously considered by the negotiators. A per capita emissions target would have offended the sensibilities of most nation-states. But, just as with technical leadership, cities are invested with the advantage of significantly greater flexibility in norm adoption, contextualization, interpretation and operationalization.\textsuperscript{xxvii} And some cities have exhibited this nimbleness by at the very least entertaining and in some cases adopting per capita emissions targets tied to global equity and global sustainability. In affirming and operationalizing such norms, ISCI and its member cities may represent part of a subversive normative vanguard of an emerging multi-level and multi-centric global climate politics.

**Conclusion**

In such a multi-level and multi-centric governance arena, the pathways and mechanisms for influence on global politics are multiple. For example, Henrik Selin and Stacy VenDeveer predict that U.S. climate policy in four years will be modeled after current municipal and state initiatives, and that U.S. climate policy will have greater influence upon global climate policy than global climate policy will have on U.S. domestic policy (2007). Such pathways to domestic change and global influence draw attention to the importance of both horizontal and vertical influence as breadth may positively capacitate depth (Appadurai 2002). And this capacity for normative innovation and diffusion may prove more significant to contemporary politics than could have been the case within a strictly multilateral framework.
To some, municipal norm adoption and advocacy may seem insignificant: The real negotiations, the real action, one might suggest, happens at the nation-state level. And in an age of globalization, many have, some with good reason, reasserted the primacy of the nation-state. But without delving into the tired argument on primacy, we might still agree that non-state actors have become more significant than they once were. Non-state actors, such as NGOs and regional entities have enjoyed a higher profile and have become more connected to each other and to the mechanisms of global politics. Cities are no exception. As Michael Peter Smith writes, “translocal networks can be collective agents of transnational projects” (2005). Municipalities have become more connected to each other, just as they have become more connected to the non-urban world. These connections present opportunities for both inter-municipal dialogue and the pooling of global influence. Together, cities have a great deal more influence than they would separately and may be among the most underexamined potential norm entrepreneurs among non-state actors in the climate discourse.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{i}}\] The author would like to thank Michele Betsill, Roy Joseph, Barry Rabe, Ashley Woodiwiss, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. Special thanks are due to Hillary Waters, whose hard work in literature review and editing has made this a better article, and to Project Teacher, a program of Wheaton College, which provided a Mentor-Guided Scholarship Stipend to facilitate Hillary’s work.
ii Cardinal Arns, of Sao Paulo, defined ‘subvert’ as “to turn a situation round and look at it from the other side, the side of people who have to die so that the system can go on” (Rahnema 1997).

iii At the 2006 Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Joshua Sapotichne, et al, presented a paper titled, “Is Urban Politics a Black Hole? Analyzing the Boundaries Between Political Science and Urban Politics,” (Sapotichne, Jones & Wolfe 2007, Sapotichne, Jones, & Wolfe 2006), in which they argued that nothing crosses “the event horizon” of a now-stale urban politics sub-field. It almost goes without saying that this caused quite the stir at the moment. It also generated a panel in response at the 2007 meeting. As discussant Judith Martin noted, the panel was characterized by two papers that accepted the terms of the argument (that is, that accepted the assumptions and external logic of the paper, but took issue with its internal logic) as described by Sapotichne, et al, and two papers that rejected the terms of the argument (while largely ceding its internal logic). These last two papers explicitly or implicitly recognized a significant literature, within and without the urban politics subfield, advancing a more vertically-integrated, multi-scale, and globally aware urban politics (Boudreau 2007, Sidney 2007). It is this literature, as well as literature on norms in global environmental governance, within which this paper hopes to be situated.

iv In recent years, however, both urbanization and cities have emerged as significant themes in the discourse of globalization. Likewise, globalization has emerged as an important topic in the discourse of urban affairs. The importance of mutual influence in the global-local relationship is evidenced in interdisciplinary developments. “Global cities” is now widely recognized as a subfield of urban studies and has achieved at least
the status of a curiosity among scholars of globalization. And urban studies have “gone
global” as internationalists increasingly turn toward the sub-national as a significant scale
in global governance while urbanists explore the impact of global developments on
prospects for local governance. Academic departments now fill faculty positions with
scholars whose primary research interest is in the role of cities, usually metropolises and
megalopolises, in an increasingly global political economy. Michigan State University
supports a new program in Global Urban Studies. And the University of California at
Berkeley has recently founded a Center for Global Metropolitan Studies, complete with
an undergraduate major and two interdisciplinary graduate groups. Evidently, the
relationship between cities and globalization is a maturing theme in both urban and
international affairs.

¹ The internationalists’ reengagement with the local is reflected, in part, by a growing
literature on municipal foreign policy in areas such as nuclear disarmament, fair trade,

vi Here I have intentionally discriminated between normative preoccupation and technical
prepossession. Per Jacques Ellul, possession is the tendency of monistic technique (1964,
1973).

vii “On ne revolutionne pas en revolutionnant. On revolutionne en solutionnant” (Le
Corbusier, 1994).

viii Of course, the notion of sustainable development is neither settled nor uncontested.

ix While AOSIS membership is strongest among small island developing states, it
includes members that are not states, not islands, not small, and not developing.
In this way, we might not be surprised to encounter suspicion of the municipal agenda in global politics, as municipalities and other governmental actors may induce a crisis of redundancy, in some measure, in civil society.

Bruno Latour would suggest that anthropogenic global climate change is representative of a specifically modern proliferation of “hybrids” resulting from the “modern constitution” and its separation of 1) subject from object, 2) nature from society, and 3) a transcendent God from reality (1993).

Inter-municipal relationships have sometimes been described as the second nature or external relations of cities (Harris, Ullman 1945, Taylor 2004). There is a rich literature on these relations (Camagni 1993, Camagni 2001, Sassen 2002). A premise of this paper is that cities have significant vertical external relations that are not inter-municipal and that both vertical and horizontal/inter-municipal external relations potentiate new roles in global governance.

Bulkeley and Betsill are exceptional in this regard, situating the cities they examine—all of which are members of ICLEI’s Cities for Climate Protection program—in the context of non-state action in global governance. Their excellent analysis in this regard, however, is limited to the role of participant cities in one among many municipal climate policy networks.

Climate change may rightly be considered a meta-hazard.

For a position that emphasizes the relative vulnerability of rural populations without minimizing urban vulnerability, see (Roberts, Parks 2007).

This is not to suggest that urban consumption was not previously global in character. Many regard colonialism as among the earliest forms of globalization, and it is certain...
that expanding urban populations and changing urban consumption drove European ships
to continental hinterlands in search of goods and raw materials. Many scholars have
noted the continuity of this relationship with the present. As Joan Martinez Alier writes,
“In this sense, Europe has never been so colonial as today. Gasoline stations on German
motorways should have signs reading ‘Kolonialwaren’” (2006).

xvii Leigh Glover, Research Fellow at the Australasian Centre for the Governance and
Management of Urban Transport, has been especially helpful to me in understanding this,
noting unsustainable urban consumption of the past (citing Dukes 2003) as well as the
future (citing Flannery 2002).

xviii I use this word, despite its inelegance, in a nod to Latour (1993), who emphasizes its
suitability to contemporary hybrids, networks, and collectives that defy modern dualisms.
Pollution is certainly among these.

xix For a thoroughgoing treatment of the spatial fix, see (Harvey 1996, Harvey 2000,
Harvey 2001).

xx Of course, this argument falls short if extraction itself negatively impacts distant
ecologies and communities.

xxi Indirect risk, in the form of “blowback,” however, might be significant. Cities might
consider the ways in which their practices of externalizing risk marginalize parts of the
global population through ecologically-mediated social relations and potentiate future
indirect risks.

xxii While USCOM’s CCP program is important, it is a translocal network with vertical
significance, but without a transnational horizontal aspect. We will focus on two
translocal networks with transnational horizontal aspects. Likewise, there are important
transnational networks the membership of which is not municipal—the Western Regional Climate Action Initiative and the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, both of which are joined, or are likely to be joined, by several Canadian provinces, are examples.

Sapporo, Japan; Goteborg, Sweden; Beijing, P.R. of China; the Hague, the Netherlands; Minneapolis, U.S.; Cape Town, South Africa; Adelaide, Australia; Oxford, U.K.; Santa Monica, U.S.; Hangzhou, P.R. of China; Linz, Austria; Barcelona, Spain; Portland, Oregon; Qingdao, P.R. of China; Gelsenkirchen, Germany; Kaohsiung, Taiwan; Sol Plaatje, South Africa; Gwangju, South Korea; and Daegu, South Korea. Eight of these are also ICEI CCP participant cities.

Hoffmann’s work on norm dynamics in global climate governance focuses on the contest between interpretations and operationalizations of the norm of universal participation, examining, among other themes, the contest between Kyoto’s “North-First” principle and “Universal Commitment” (2005, 2007).

While some ICLEI CCP member cities have set per capita targets, they have done so largely in order to permit emissions growth consistent with population growth and have not set those targets according to a sustainable level of global anthropogenic GHG emissions divided by global population.

It should be noted that even Kyoto’s commitments are non-binding. That is, there are no formal enforcement mechanisms written into the Protocol.

This flexibility is evidenced by, among other phenomena, the election of Green Party mayors in Germany. While such candidates are yet unviable in the national level, Green Party candidates and their platforms prove more viable at the local level.
References


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33


